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ABSTRACT

This essay examines the ways in which art and art history, as disciplines, have been influenced by feminist scholarship and research into the areas of gender, sexuality, and race. It explains that before the interventions of feminist art historians and theorists of art, beginning in the 1970s, the history of art was conceived of and taught as a chronological sequence of masters and monuments in Western art. The essay goes on to note that a feminist history of art emerged in the 1970s, led by the publication of Linda Nochlin's essay "Why Have There Been No Great Women Artists?" It explains that feminism, art, and arts activism have gone hand in hand since the early days of the contemporary women's movement. In 1980s feminist art history continued to investigate women's achievements, as well as focusing on challenging the traditional assumptions of art history itself; in the 1990s authors and publishers were attempting to include women artists in survey texts. The feminist perspective has also influenced pedagogy, leading to more interaction and collaboration between teachers and students. (Contains 125 references.) (MDM)

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Discipline Analysis

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Miami University
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WOMEN in the CURRICULUM

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National Center for
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Resources on Women
1997

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PREFACE

Since the 1970s feminist and multicultural scholarship has been challenging the traditional content, organization, methodologies, and epistemologies of the academic disciplines. By now this scholarship is formidable in both quantity and quality and in its engagement of complex issues. The National Center for Curriculum Transformation Resources on Women is therefore publishing a series of essays that provide brief, succinct overviews of the new scholarship. Outstanding scholars in the disciplines generously agreed to write the essays, which are intended to help faculty who want to revise courses in light of the new information and perspectives. Each essay is accompanied by a bibliography that includes references for further reading, resources for the classroom, and electronic resources.

Elaine Hedges

Series Editor

ART

Before the interventions of feminist historians and theorists of art, beginning in the 1970s, the history of art was conceived and taught as a chronological sequence of masters and monuments—the great men and works—in Western art, and, more rarely, in Eastern art. In Western art, this sequence consisted of a canon of "great" works which emphasized classical antiquity and the Italian Renaissance as the most important periods and as the bearers of what was thought to be "our" culture. Such a reading of the history of art, however, tended to neglect other periods, including pre-Greek art (prehistoric, Egyptian, Mesopotamian), the Middle Ages, and Modern art. Most neglected were arts not recognized as participating in the Western tradition—African, Islamic, Oceanic, and South American art, and the art of marginalized or colonized peoples, including Native Americans, African Americans, Asian Americans, and of course, women, who were doubly marginalized if they came from one of these latter groups. Those outside the mainstream were perhaps not deliberately excluded, but because of the pervasiveness of the Western patriarchal vision, they simply did not count. The standard of inclusion was "quality," and "quality" was a self-serving term meaning what was familiar to a select few—white, European males.

Judging by the survey texts in art history published before the early 1990s, art was created only by men, and although women appeared in the reproductions in these

texts, they were seen as objects in paintings and sculptures, not as creators in their own right. In part due to the widespread linking of women with nature and men with culture, women artists who did productive work were excluded from the "master narrative" as insignificant. Often they were omitted because including them disrupted the conventional flow of the story. Their exclusion was also sometimes justified by arguments suggesting that women were innately inferior to men in terms of creative ability. Interestingly enough, Helen Gardner, author of one of the most popular survey books, *Art Through the Ages*, now in its tenth edition (the first appeared in 1926), had noted the exclusion of women in preparing for her third edition, and she had characterized her own work as too "Europocentric." However, World War II and her death in 1946 prevented her revisions from being published. Since her death her book has been revised by teams of scholars.

In the 1990s, authors and publishers have attempted to include women artists in existing survey texts, with varying degrees of success. Some appear to have added a few women artists to their histories in a grudging bow to political correctness. Others, like Marilyn Stokstad, *et al.*, in *Art History*, give greater attention to a number of women artists and discuss the reasons for their previous exclusions. Very soon, surveys of world art will appear which discuss art history from a feminist perspective, treating women artists more fully and dealing with issues of how women have been represented in art and why. These new survey texts depend on the substantial scholarship published in the past twenty-six years, which has revealed the existence and creativity of women artists who were formerly lost or excluded. This scholarship, discussed more fully in the following pages, has shown that women artists were often known in their own time periods but forgotten later, or that their work was attributed to their more fa-

mous male relatives or counterparts, for example, Marietta Robusti (Tintoretto's daughter) and Judith Leyster (whose work was attributed to Frans Hals).

Feminist scholarship in art history has further demonstrated that social and institutional barriers prevented women from pursuing careers in art because a woman's place was thought to be in the home, not the studio. Nonetheless, women did pursue art, and, as more and more women are recovered, the whole history of art has been expanded and rewritten, not just to accommodate a few more artists, but because the knowledge of women artists we have now gained has changed our very notion of what art history and history in general is. History is not a seamless narrative chronicling the lives and work of a selected few, but a richer and more complex story of what the conditions and purposes of artistic production actually were and are. We could describe this as a paradigm shift, a shift from "art history" to the "history of art," from an emphasis on style and aesthetic merit to a broader social and cultural history. More recently, scholars are practicing what they call "visual culture," including popular culture, technology, and media formerly dismissed as "craft." An environment more congenial to women and others who have been excluded should be the result.

A feminist history of art was launched in 1971 with the publication of Linda Nochlin's essay, "Why Have There Been No Great Women Artists?," in a leading journal, *Art News*. The issues Nochlin raised came directly from her experience in teaching a course at Vassar in 1969 on the image of women in 19th- and 20th-century art. Turning from an art history which focused on great works by great male artists, she shifted attention to the seeming dearth of women artists in that period and earlier, and discovered, as subsequent scholarship has confirmed, that indeed women artists had existed in the past but had either

been forgotten, deliberately written out of history, or undervalued in comparison to the male artists who were heroized as universal geniuses. Male artists spoke for all people, it was assumed, as there seemed to be no need for other voices. Nochlin argued that social and institutional barriers, not lack of talent or genius, have in the past prevented women's equal participation in art production. She cited as important factors in limiting women's art production lack of educational opportunities, lack of access to life-drawing classes in periods when drawing from the nude was the norm, and unwillingness on the part of teachers, art establishments, academies of art, and exhibitors to depart from the status quo ("the white Western male viewpoint"). Women, for example, were explicitly forbidden to study or exhibit in such institutions as the French Academy. Although four women were admitted in 1783 during the turmoil leading up to the French Revolution, women were soon again denied entrance, until 1897, by which time academic training was largely irrelevant. The English Royal Academy was somewhat more liberal, and two women artists, Mary Moser and Angelica Kauffmann, were founding members in 1768. Thereafter, women were barred from studying the nude model and barred from membership until 1936.

Feminists from Nochlin on have been wary of simply proposing women artists as equal to male artists, since doing so reinforces the patriarchal pattern of looking for "greatness" in a self-serving system. Following Nochlin's lead, they have been questioning the definition of "great" and expanding or replacing traditional aesthetic standards and methodologies. Nochlin challenged the "assumption that the traditional divisions of intellectual inquiry are still adequate to deal with the meaningful questions of our time" (1971: 24). Traditional art historical methodologies, such as connoisseurship and formal and stylistic analysis, have been considered too limited to serve as the primary

focus of art historical study, demanding to be supplemented with analyses of content and historical context. Nochlin further cautioned against proposing different standards of greatness for women and men, since, though women and men may be different, no "subtle essence of femininity" links all female artists. She called for a re-examination of institutional structures themselves—how art and art history are practiced and taught—and how art is received and used by its audiences—in order for us to understand how women and women's roles have been constructed in the past and how we can restructure them.

Feminist art scholarship since Nochlin has further explored these issues. Reinforced by scholarship in other fields and by feminist art, it has focused on two fundamental goals—learning more about individual women artists and learning more about the social and cultural constructions of women as represented in art by both female and male artists.

Surveys of women artists began to appear in the early 1970s, giving historical validity to the actual existence and careers of women artists in the past. Books like Eleanor Tufts' *Our Hidden Heritage* (1974), Karen Petersen's and J.J. Wilson's *Women Artists* (1976), Elsa Honig Fine's *The Afro-American Artist: A Search for Identity* (1973), and her *Women and Art* (1978), helped to establish a sound basis for understanding the careers, successes and dilemmas of a great number of women artists. These recovered lives and the images of the work produced made the history of art more complete, offered women scholars and artists role models from the past, and introduced issues still being discussed about women's training in the arts, managing a career, balancing art with life's demands and satisfactions, patronage, themes and ideas in the art, and relationships with male artists and the art world at any given time. Scholarly journals also appeared, such as *Feminist Art*

Journal (1972-77), *Women Artists Newsletter*, from 1975, *womanart*, from 1976, *Chrysalis*, from 1977, *Heresies*, from 1977, and *Woman's Art Journal*, from 1980 to the present. This wealth of information and dialogue gave teachers and scholars the necessary factual and visual resources to work with and established a sense of pride and community with others engaged in the same project.

The first Feminist Art Program, directed by artist Judy Chicago, was started at Fresno State College (now Cal State, Fresno) in 1970. In 1971, Chicago and artist Miriam Schapiro jointly directed the Feminist Art Program at CalArts, where the collaborative project "Womanhouse" was the major creative outcome. This project—each woman artist creating works and installations in one room of the house—came out of the recognition that women students had been slighted in traditional art programs. "Womanhouse" offered a space in which participants could work freely and address the issues raised by their own experiences as women and as artists in a male-dominated art world. The notion that a woman's place was in the home was vigorously engaged by these artists so that the home, with its spaces stereotypically assigned to women (kitchen, dining room, bathroom, bedroom), could be transformed into artistic statements about women's roles. (See *The Power of Feminist Art*, edited by Norma Broude and Mary Garrard (1994), for more information and many reproductions of the work.)

In 1972, Ann Gabhart and Elizabeth Broun organized the show, "Old Mistresses: Women Artists of the Past," at the Walters Art Gallery in Baltimore. In 1976, Nochlin and Ann Sutherland Harris organized an exhibition, with scholarly catalogue, *Women Artists: 1550-1950*, which brought the work of eighty-five women artists great visibility in the United States and provided scholarly analysis

of the work of these artists, many of whom were previously underrated or unfamiliar to a contemporary audience. These early exhibitions were put together with enormous difficulty, including resistance to the idea of all-women shows and problems finding the actual works, which were often relegated to museum storerooms.

Feminism, art, and arts activism have gone hand in hand since the early days of the women's movement. The Women's Caucus for Art—at first a branch of the College Art Association and then a separate but affiliated group—was founded in 1972 with Ann Sutherland Harris as its first President. Groups were organized all over the country to protest exclusions in the art world and to demand representation of women artists in galleries and museums. The Guerrilla Girls began protesting exclusions in New York City (and by extension everywhere) in 1985, and their activism and collaborative spirit have made them highly visible as the "conscience of the art world." Artwriter Lucy Lippard, an activist since 1970, has produced a series of books and articles which document the ideas and issues of these years, indeed often anticipating the next step both in greater understanding and in inclusion of marginalized peoples.

John Berger's book, *Ways of Seeing* (1972), based on a BBC television series, set out important ideas about the role of vision in art and advertising. He discussed the prevalence of the female nude in European oil painting and the fact that often men see women in paintings as objects to be possessed through the male gaze in much the same way as they possess works of art by purchasing them. A woman depicted with a mirror (Susanna or Venus) joins as a spectator of herself, a passive object who is watched—a sign—a thing given value or feared by a male viewer. Berger's ideas remain influential in discussions of the im-

portance of the visual in society and in discussions of agency in art, in an effort to determine whose values are depicted—the artist's, the subject's, or even that viewer's.

Many other feminist writers have contributed significantly to feminist theory and the history of art, particularly in the related disciplines of philosophy, psychoanalytic thought, deconstruction, literary theory, creative writing, linguistics, women's studies and ethnic studies. They speak of the dangers of dualistic thinking—setting up binary pairs in opposition to each other and implicitly privileging the first term: for example, man/woman; reason/emotion; culture/nature. Julia Kristeva's essay, "Women's Time," in 1979 was instrumental in clarifying goals for feminist artists and scholars. She stated that active research "in the wake of contemporary art [tries] to break the code, to shatter language, to find a specific discourse closer to the body and emotions, to the unnameable repressed by the social contract." All these tasks are very much issues for artists in terms of subject, form, and content. The artist Barbara Kruger, for example, takes her texts from these ideas, as in her giant photograph with text that reads, "We won't play nature to your culture."

Throughout the 1970s feminist artists explored ways of breaking the code (the canon and unitary aspect of the patriarchal narrative) and shattering what they determined to be patriarchal language—oil painting, in particular, and Modernist images which *seemed* to be empty of content. There was a great deal of interest in the notion of women's essence, celebrating the ways in which women could be seen to be different from men. Artists like Faith Ringgold, Audrey Flack, Carolee Schneemann, Nancy Spero, Las Mujeres Muralista (a San Francisco group) and others explored female imagery and style, asking if central core imagery, soft colors, collaborative work methods, and layering of textures were specifically feminine or female. Work

in fabric, embroidery, quilting, photography and collage were affirmed as alternatives to oil painting, and the content of art—women's experience—was emphasized to overcome the Modernists' seeming reliance on form. Artists and art writers like Lucy Lippard maintained the importance of being politically active in supporting women and human rights issues and making art directly connected to specific political agendas. In addition, artists and art historians investigated "matriarchal" cultures in history, hoping that Neolithic sites like those of Old Europe and Crete would show evidence of peaceful rule by women and cooperative societies. Female deities in ancient art in particular were useful as role models and in offering a sense of female power.

In the 1980s, feminist art history continued to investigate women's achievements and also focused on challenging the traditional assumptions of art history itself. Some scholars, like Rozsika Parker and Griselda Pollock, insisted that art history be transformed or dismantled because its ideologies were detrimental to women. Their book, *Old Mistresses: Women, Art and Ideology* (1981), changed the focus from a history of women artists to an analysis of the relations between women, art, and ideology, acknowledging that art history is not an objective discourse but has its own agendas. They stated that instead of proving that women have been great artists or indicting art history for its neglect of women artists, they wished to determine why women's art, including their textile art, has been misrepresented and what this reveals about the discipline of art history itself. Pollock's next book, *Vision and Difference* (1988), continued this examination, discussing feminist art histories and their relations to Marxism, and providing a close reading of Impressionist paintings by both women and men painters, revealing how subject matter, the use of pictorial space, and the ways in which female subjects and artists negotiate that space differ.

In 1982, scholars Norma Broude and Mary Garrard published *Feminism and Art History: Questioning the Litany*, an anthology of seventeen essays on feminist issues ranging from the status of women in ancient Egypt to contemporary art and American quilts. Their second and much larger volume, *The Expanding Discourse*, appeared in 1992, and in 1994 *The Power of Feminist Art* provided a history of feminist art from the 1970s on. An important article, "The Feminist Critique of Art History" by Thalia Gouma-Peterson and Patricia Mathews, appeared as the lead article, subtitled "The State of Research," in the September 1987 *Art Bulletin*. This work summarizes the issues and participants in feminist art history up to 1987.

By the 1980s, the issue first raised in the 1970s of whether there could be specifically female imagery, female ways of creating, and even media more congenial to women or more characteristic of a female sensibility had become problematic. Some scholars in various fields are still exploring the ways in which women might be understood to be different from men, but in feminist art history, as in other disciplines, the emphasis has shifted from ideas about woman's essence to the idea that identity is largely culturally constructed. Biological identity as female is one factor, but others include race, gender, ethnicity, class, sexual preference, age, health, and religion and their interconnections; all have become avenues for scholarly analysis.

In feminist art history, as in other disciplines, it was possible by the 1980s to speak of feminisms, as scholars embraced multiculturalism, explored issues of diversity and difference, and engaged in dialogues across different groups. Border theory developed as an attempt to discover what group is in the mainstream (of art, culture, society) and which groups are on the borders and marginalized. Border theory asks what the interactions are between the center and the borders, how people are similar and how

they are different, how one's identity is constructed as both female and black or Asian or Chicana in a predominantly white society, or how an individual may inhabit multiple ethnicities. Reception theory is another development, which asks how works of art and visual productions are received by their audiences, focusing on how people respond to images produced in their culture. In an article in 1994 entitled "Beyond the Canon: Feminists, Postmodernism, and the History of Art," art historian Karen-Edis Barzman makes a strong case for investigating not only women as producers of art and art history, but also "s/he who is addressed, the viewer, beholder, spectator." She also asserts, if we understand her correctly, that feminist art historians should not be disturbed or disheartened if feminist art history is not received as a homogeneous voice, even though feminist art historians "use gender as a point of departure in the transformation of art history's entrenched structures." She is committed to a pluralism of approaches which are, in her terms, relational, dialectical, counter-hegemonic, unfixed, protean, ready to shift. Thus, there is room for those who seek similarities in the category "woman," for those who emphasize difference, and for those who resist categories of identity altogether. Hence, feminist art history intersects with queer theory, the study of peoples hitherto silenced because of their sexual preference, and with post-colonial theory.

An interest in women in art and in visual production and reception must include interest in multicultural issues in the broadest sense, in the arts of colonized peoples and of minorities. Thomas McEvilley, in an essay entitled "Here Comes Everybody," in the exhibition catalogue *From Beyond the Pale*, published to position Irish art in its own context and not as subordinate to English art, sees four stages in the colonizing process. This process moves from the pre-colonial world where each culture felt itself at the center of the world, to points of contact, comparison

to, emulation of, and alienation from the colonizer, to revolution against the colonizers and an assertion of self (1994: 12-13). These stages can be applied to feminist art history, as scholars and audience move from one stage to another, or refigure the entire construct. This can be seen, for example, in Lucy Lippard and the artists she discusses in *Mixed Blessings* (1990), who explore identity and difference in their context in the American hemisphere—South, Central, and North.

Two anthologies edited by Joanna L. Frueh, Cassandra L. Langer, and Arlene Raven, *Feminist Art Criticism* (1988), and *New Feminist Criticism* (1994), raise questions about past and contemporary artists and artworks which deal with the problematics of identity and difference in a broadened cultural context, often from varying points of view. These anthologies treat such topics as inclusion (of African-American artists and peoples, Chicanas, Asian artists, lesbian artists, older artists), ecology and feminism, and sexuality.

One topic currently receives perhaps the greatest attention, and it is related to all the others mentioned here: discussion of the body. The body is the logical focus of discussion because it is through and with our bodies that we experience the world and others, noting similarities and differences; further, the body is highly visible in works of art and throughout culture. A contribution of feminist art history is to assert that the "body" under current scrutiny is not separated from mind (brain, consciousness, spirit). The female body has been devalued or reviled in much of history, in both Eastern and Western traditions, and there is a certain gleeful, even celebratory aspect to contemporary art and feminist art history, as artists and scholars explore the previously forbidden subjects of sexuality, the

erotic, the diseased body, body fragments and functions, bodies alone, bodies with other bodies, and bodies with machines. The work of African-American artists like Adrian Piper, Carrie Mae Weems, and Lorna Simpson deals with these issues. Barbara De Genevieve's photography explores the erotic in her self-portraits—what might be erotic for her and what is conventionally considered to be erotic. Hannah Wilke used her own surgery as a subject before her death in 1993. Kiki Smith explores defecation and Diamonda Galas the pain of human suffering in her performances. Scholars like Joanna Frueh in *Erotic Faculties* (1996), and Sallie Tisdale in *Talk Dirty to Me* (1994), explain aspects of sexuality, the visual sources of eroticism and its pleasures for certain women. All of this is perhaps turning the tables on earlier paintings and sculptures and discussions of them in traditional art history which treated the female nude as a passive object made and enjoyed by men.

Finally, women representing multiple perspectives are speaking for and to an ever-widening audience. The new anthology, *Sexuality in Ancient Art*, edited by Natalie Boymel Kampen (1996), is a case in point. The book deals with issues of gender and sexuality in ancient art and with the position or set of attitudes of the art historian commenting on them. Ancient art here is not limited to the conventional Greek and Roman, but includes Egyptian, Mesopotamian, and Etruscan art. The anthology discusses not just major monuments, but fragments and little known works. It includes essays on women's and men's sexual presence in art, rape and abduction as represented in art and as understood by the audience, "hypersexual black men" in mosaic house decorations of white patrician individuals in Augustan Pompeii, pregnant women, and the homosexuality of some art historians and how that may affect their reading of art.

There are now courses which deal primarily with the art of women and of African Americans or Native Americans. Even traditional courses like "The Art of the Renaissance," for example, have been transformed to include discussions of issues of women's exclusion, the status and education of women, how women were depicted and what that means—in general, more cultural context and a reassessment of former assumptions about the status and value of works by male artists. Courses on the Renaissance may now include a discussion of the art of the Americas around 1492, of Africa, and of areas outside Italy or Northern Europe. The art of the Northern Renaissance—once gendered as feminine because it dealt more with emotion and personal expression than form—has been reevaluated and seen less as a weaker copy of the Italian and more on its own terms, even as a contributor to contemporary values and postmodernism (Dunning, 1995).

The transformations in feminist art history and theory obviously demand a shift not just in art historical premises but in pedagogy. Students, coming from more and more diverse backgrounds and becoming increasingly more aware, demand greater participation and want to do more than memorize the slides and dates of traditional art history courses (Dietrich and Smith-Hurd, 1995). Pedagogical practice itself is therefore changing. No longer is the art history teacher the authority figure who lectures in a half-darkened room. Rather, she is the facilitator for students' understanding and empowerment. Classroom dynamics are inevitably changing as teachers and learners engage in greater collaboration. Constructing art history has become a cooperative effort between students and instructor. This shift in focus to include women, toward multiculturalism, and toward changes in pedagogy has been evident not only in scholarship and in universities around the country, but

also in the numerous sessions at the College Art Association annual meetings. Since 1993, a special session has been included on educational issues, and it is one of the liveliest!

Feminist art history does no damage to canonical art—only to narrow and reductive assumptions about art. In fact, feminist interventions in art history have vitalized the field. Art can now be seen as a tool for understanding human behavior and not as some repository of unapproachable sacred objects. In the same way, Latin is not a dead language but an arena in which we meet with those who used it in their terms and time. The art historians who still want to do connoisseurship or stylistic analysis exclusively might do so, but those who apply the new methodologies and who practice a broader cultural or visual history are producing a richer and more inclusive history of art. Students will be very much aware of the differences, and the survey class (like the others) has inevitably been broadened to acknowledge the history of art as a field responsive to a wide variety of human issues.

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Individual Artists

Many monographs and exhibition catalogues are dedicated to single women artists. See your library for specific women artists.

Electronic Networks

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Women Artists Archive

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The Feminist Art History Listserve

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About the Authors

Linnea S. Dietrich, a professor of art history at Miami University in Oxford, Ohio, teaches women in art, 19th- and 20th-century art, ancient Egyptian art, and the history and methods of art history. Her dissertation was on the symbolism in the Tahitian paintings of Paul Gauguin, and that topic has led her to explorations in the areas of feminist theory and multiculturalism. She has published articles on these subjects and is now working on a six-volume history of art with medievalist Dr. Catherine Karkov, for Prentice Hall/Abrams.

Diane Smith-Hurd is professor of art history at the Art Academy of Cincinnati, where she has been teaching since 1979. Currently, she is also Chair of Academic Studies. She teaches feminist art, history of 20th-century design, 20th-century and contemporary art, and has published on these subjects.

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The following publications consist of directories, manuals, and essays covering the primary information needed by educators to transform the curriculum to incorporate the scholarship on women. The publications have been designed to be brief, user friendly, and cross referenced to each other. They can be purchased as a set or as individual titles. Tables of contents and sample passages are available on the National Center Web page: http://www.towson.edu/ncctrw/.

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The *Directory* provides brief descriptions of 237 curriculum transformation projects or activities from 1973 to the present. It is intended to help educators review the amount and kinds of work that have been occurring in curriculum transformation on women and encourage them to consult project publications (see also *Catalog of Resources*) and to contact project directors for more information about projects of particular interest and relevance to their needs.

386 pages, 8½ x 11 hardcover, $30 individuals, $45 institutions, ISBN 1-885303-07-6

➢ ***Catalog of Curriculum Transformation Resources***

The *Catalog* lists materials developed by curriculum transformation projects and national organizations that are available either free or for sale. These include proposals, reports, bibliographies, workshop descriptions, reading lists, revised syllabi, classroom materials, participant essays, newsletters, and other products of curriculum transformation activities, especially from those projects listed in the *Directory*. These resources provide valuable information, models, and examples for educators leading and participating in curriculum transformation activities.

(Available fall 1997)

➢ ***Introductory Bibliography for Curriculum Transformation***

The *Introductory Bibliography* provides a list of references for beginning curriculum transformation on women, especially for those organizing projects and activities for faculty and teachers. It does not attempt to be comprehensive but rather to simplify the process of selection by offering an "introduction" that will lead you to other sources.

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➢ ***Getting Started: Planning Curriculum Transformation***

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